

Summary of email interview with Joaquin “Marty” Martinez

Marty Joaquin’s father, Teodoro Martinez, was from Guadalajara, Mexico and mother, Celia Lopez, was from Albuquerque, New Mexico. His father ran to Mexico with his wife during WWII all because his relatives and friends in Mexico told him not to go to the war because it was not his war, but the same people later pointed to him as a coward. So he rapidly presented himself to the American consulate and was shipped to Fort Bliss, TX and left his mother pregnant with Joaquin in Guadalajara.

After the war, Teodoro returned and took his wife back to L.A. and left young Marty with his sister, Aunt Maria, so she raised him. Marty grew up thinking that Maria and her husband, Juan Gallo, were his parents. Juan loved Marty like his own son but died when Marty was only 5 years old. Marty always wondered why he was Martinez-Lopez and not Gallo-Martinez.

When Marty was 21, he wanted to go to Disneyland. So he went to the American consulate to get a tourist visa and learned his real parents were Teodoro Martinez and Celia Lopez; and that he could not get a tourist visa, but must register as a US citizen. So he moved to California to live with his real mother in 1967. She said she had gone every year to take him back with her (but could not locate him). As soon he arrived in Glendale, Marty registered for selective service like everybody and his draft status was 1Y (qualified for service only in time of [declared] war or national emergency).

In August 19, 1969, he returned to Mexico to marry Silvia, the old way with no sex until after the church wedding. The legal marriage was only to fix her papers to take her with him to the States. After the legal marriage, the plan was to get married by the church a year later in the summer of 1970, but his draft classification changed to 1A and he received his “congratulations letter.” He was drafted after living only three years in the United States. His father had told him, “If the draft get you, don’t do what I did. Face your destiny, don’t listen to your friends and family because they are going to point to you like my friends did to me.” Just before going to Fort Ord, Marty returned to Guadalajara to tell his half wife he been drafted and if she did not want to wait, he would let her go free, but she told him, “I will wait for you,” and she did. Sure enough all his friends and relatives told him, “Don’t go. It is not your war. Mexico is not in the war.” His godfather told him, “We can hide you in a small town of Cuautla Jalisco up in Sierra,” then Marty remembered what his father had told him so he just ignored them. Marty went through Basic Training, Advanced Individual Training (AIT), and on-the-job-training (OJT) as a truck driver at Fort Ord, California.

Arrival in Vietnam

Marty Martinez arrived at Bien Hoa, Viet Nam around 14 September 1970, and was assigned to the 512th Transportation Company at Camp Addison, near Qui Nhon. The headquarters was on the middle of a hill and you could see the motor stables from there. Marty and another GI, named Sinerman, reported in. Marty only weighed 90 pounds and Sinerman was more or less about the same weight. The clerk asked if they

wanted to drive a 10-ton. Both looked down the hill and saw the 5-tons. They had just driven deuce and halves back in Fort Ord in AIT and had never seen a 5-ton before, so they both mistook them for 10-tons and said yes.

That afternoon they were sitting outside their barracks on the side of the QL-19, just across from the Ponderosa when about 1800 hours, the Heavy Lift Platoon rolled in. Upon seeing the big trucks, Marty said, "Ooooo shit, what I got into, those suckers are big." But he did not ask to be transferred to the 5-tons.

Both walked to the motor stables with Sergeant Wolf, the platoon leader, also a small guy. When Marty got close to the 10-tons, they were big. The tires were almost shoulder high to him. The tractor was a M-123 10-ton 6X6 tractor with V8 engine, 10-gear transmission, with two sticks, one for low and high gear and the other for five-speed. The 10-tons ran slower up hill, but down hill the drivers could kick it out of gear and no one could catch them, not from the top of the pass but on areas where the highway was straight down and straight up and also almost at the bottom of the passes. They called it "Chinese Overdrive." Marty loved driving them, even the gun trucks called them to complain the 10-tons were going too fast down the hill.

The Heavy Lift Platoon had its own gun truck, The BAD HOMBRE, and the 10-tons ran in separate convoys. The 10-ton convoys had only about ten, five Dagon Wagons and five low boys, only the Bad Hombre and also the "Charlie Charlie" (convoy commander) in the gun jeep, Little Bad Hombre, with two M-60s, and a maintenance truck with a M-60 a bunch of tires and spare parts. The maintenance truck was not armed like a gun truck, just a 5-ton with an M-60. It had a driver and a gunner named Harris. Harris was a very good friend of Marty's. Marty's first truck was named "Tijuana Taxi."

A Dragon Wagon was a big trailer with 16 wheels designed to haul heavy loads. The Low Boy trailer carried only light cargo and could also be pulled by a 5-ton tractor. Marty's Dragon Wagon once hauled a 56.6-ton M60A1 AVLB (bridge tank) complete with all sections. It was so heavy that his engine died every time the rig tried to move, so the Charlie Charlie ordered two 10-ton bobtails to push on each ramp of his Dragon Wagon, just to get his truck moving. He was then ordered to kick out ahead of the convoy and the two bobtails followed him. Just before he reached the An Khe Pass, the convoy finally caught up, so they drove down the Pass and Marty's tachometer kept going up on low first, so he had to play with the Johnny bar and brakes to slow the speed to about 5 miles per hour. He told his shot gun, "If I tell you jump, you jump and don't ask any questions and jump, because if I lose this F.... Nobody is going to stop it." Fortunately they made it safely to the bottom of the Pass, but the wheels of the Dragon became so hot and they started to blow up. The load was so heavy the trailer needed three heavy duty jacks to change the tires. He left a little damage in the road but made it all the way to Qui Nhon port.

1st Ambush

Marty's first ambush was in the An Khe Pass driving a 10-ton tractor with the gun truck The Match Box as his load. This gun truck broke down in Pleiku, so the gunners were riding shotgun in the other trucks. The convoy stopped at top of the An Khe Pass just before the Hair Pin, because there was an ambush down below. The Charlie Charlie was in the lead like always, but after the complete stop, he came and told Marty there was contact down there and they may have to go back to the An Khe base. Someone ordered the convoy to go through it, and a few minutes later the Charlie Charlie came back and told the gunners to jump in the Match Box and get ready, they are going through the ambush. The convoy commander then came to Marty and told him, since Marty had the gun truck on his low boy, he was ordered to take lead and, "Don't stop till you reach Bridge 19."

The gunners jumped on the gun truck and they headed down the hill. Heading up the Pass, they encountered part of the convoy with one gun truck, and the drivers looked kind of worried. Almost three or four curves before the bottom of the pass, Marty took the curve to the left and there was the ambush on the next wide curve. When Marty came around the curve, he saw to the right a burning truck loaded with ammo and tracers flying everywhere. Four gun trucks (he didn't remember their names) were in the kill zone and the gunners of the first gun truck were waving for him to stop, but his orders were to reach Bridge 19. So he just kept going until he reached the bridge at the bottom of the pass. When he reached Bridge 19, jumped out of the cab and realized no one else drove through the kill zone. It was just him and his cargo, The Match Box and its crew. The bridge was protected by the tiger division of the Korean army. So the NCOIC of the Matchbox, Leo Parks, told him, "We have to go back and help." So Marty backed his rig up the hill into the kill zone, but this time some Korean forces walked along side his truck. When they arrived the fighting was still going, so he stopped, took a position and engaged the enemy. The Koreans wanted to go after Charlie, for a few minutes we hold them but then they just jump into the jungle still in the right side of us, so the NCOIC started yelling on the radio, "Cease fire, friendly forces in the area." He repeated it and the fire stop and the only shots could be heard were the small arms from Charlie. The Americans ducked, heard more shots and then just silence. Later the Koreans came back with a dead VC. Since that incident, everybody thought Marty was nuts, because he drove back into the kill zone.

2nd Ambush

Another ambush was on the way to LZ English, when the Glory Stompers was hit. Marty was driving his 10-ton in a 5-ton convoy. He did not remember how many other trucks or 10-tons were in the convoy and how many gun trucks much less their names. He only remembered when the Glory Stompers was hit by a B40 rocket and all hell broke loose. Tracers came all over from the left. Marty and his shotgun, SP5 Cecilio Longoria from Falfurrias, Texas, opened fire from the cab. Longoria was on his second tour in Nam and opened fire on the right side. Marty tried to shoot out the left with his M-16 on his lap at

times and driving at the same time. The convoy did not stop, just kept going. Marty did not remember seeing any enemy, since he was a driver and his orders were to shoot and get the hell out of the kill zone to the nearest base A.S.A.P. The only thing he did remember was the tracers going all over, the big explosions, smoke and especially the road. A gun truck followed him and once they were secure at the fire base, the gun truck returned to the kill zone. Marty was the one who took back the rest of the Glory Stompers.

One time in 1971 after hauling a load of projos to Pleiku. Before they rolled into camp, somebody began separating truck to keep going. Those trucks turned left and headed south to the border of either Laos or Cambodia. They crossed a small river. The bridge was so narrow and Marty's outside tires were hanging in the air. He could only cross with inside tires. They went to a Green Beret camp.

Bad Hombre

December 1970 or January 1971 when an AIT buddy of his was killed, Marty became very upset and volunteered to go on the gun truck. Taco, a guy from Tortugas, New Mexico, his father died and since he was the only man left of the family, he was sent home for good and Marty jumped in The Bad Hombre later renamed just Bad Hombre. The difference from The Bad Hombre and Bad Hombre was the set up. The Bad Hombre had three 50's and two M60's. Bad Hombre had four .50's mounted and two handheld M60's, one in the cab for the driver and the other in the back, and also four M79s.

Since the gun trucks always run loaded, the engines wore out before the other trucks. The engine of The Bad Hombre was worn out and the crew had to get a new one, because The Bad Hombre could not keep up with the convoys. Two tow trucks lifted the box of The Bad Hombre and transferred it onto the chassis of a new truck. It took a 10-ton to keep it from flipping, move the old chassis and put the new one under. After that we took The Bad Hombre to get a new paint job and the crew asked the painter to go easy painting over the art work, so they could repaint it, but he went very heavy and there was no trace of the old artwork, so me and Archuleta a driver from Colorado helped me to paint the new sign Bad Hombre and also we change the set up and we went from 3 50's to 4, the date I don't remember.

An Italian guy was the NCOIC of The Bad Hombre but was short with maybe a month left in Vietnam. Bob was a very nice guy from North Carolina, and Tex became the new NCOIC. He later left the gun truck, and Leo Parks, the NCOIC from the Match Box, came to be the new NCOIC of Bad Hombre. The Match Box was from the 523 Trans, which was inactivated.¹ All the men were transferred to the other units. Leo Parks came to the 512 Trans, there was another guy, John Lemos, from San Fernando Valley, CA had been a gunner of Steppin Wolf then became a gunner on The Bad Hombre. John and Marty served together basic training. They took the same bus at the induction center, and together at basic, AIT, OJT, and the same company and platoon in Vietnam.

¹ The 523rd was sent north to I Corps Tactical Zone in January 1971 but the 669th TC was inactivated in March 1971.

The crews did not receive any training just volunteered and jumped in the gun truck. The three gunners or two rotated as drivers, one drove a section of the road first, second or third, so no body drove all the way. Marty was assigned to the right rear machinegun; but once the crew was reduced to only three, the NCOIC would man the right front machinegun close to the radio, and then Marty would take any of the ones in the left on the driver's side.

One night, The Bad Hombre moved to the perimeter and the camp was attacked. A small tank with two small barrels responded fire along with the gun trucks. Marty later learned the VC attacked the village and killed the French priest and two or three nuns.

In July 1971, Marty went on R&R to Sidney, Australia thinking he was going to see topless girls on the beaches, but it was winter down there. After he returned, Marty was engaged in three ambushes.

3rd Ambush

In August or early September, Bad Hombre was rearguard of a convoy was heading up An Khe Pass and just about the same place of the other one. Small arms fire started, so the convoy tried to get the hell out of the kill zone, but a Champaign² stopped his truck and got out to open fire on the left side of the road. He changed a couple of magazines and then tried to get back in his truck when a B40 hit his truck. He was also hit so part of the convoy was stopped in the kill zone engaging the enemy. After a while, troops from the Korean Tiger Division arrived. Somebody picked up the driver and went up hill to dust off the wounded. Leo Parks, NCOIC of the Bad Hombre, was also slightly wounded on his right side.

Days later Marty and others went to see Champaign. He lost one leg and when he saw the gun truck crew, he start crying and said, "I fucked up, I did what I wasn't suppose to do, but I guess I'm not going to play foot ball again."

4th Ambush

His next ambush was on the way to Tuy Hoa. The cargo trucks hauled troops. That ambush was a very bad one and was very hard for Marty to remember. The reason was a lot of pain, many, many wounded. Fire came very fast from the right side along with homemade mines detonated on the cargo, so a lots of confusion. Troops tried to get out of the trucks, take cover and respond fire. Bad Hombre opened fire, it was bad. Marty doesn't like to think about it. After it was over Bad Hombre covered the area and set a LZ for the dust off. Troops from the Korean White Horse Division came to help but the damage was done. Many infantry guys were very badly wounded and some killed. And like a ghost Charlie vanished. It was hit and run. Marty did not like to remember this ambush.

² Marty was not certain of the name.

5th Ambush

On the way to Pleiku, the convoy entered the “VC Valley” between Mang Giang and the An Khe Passes. The convoy drove up a slope and headed for a curve. The convoy curved to the right and then went down into ravine at the bottom a curve to the left and went up at small hill then curved back to the right. Entering the first curve one could see the other two curves, but the bottom of the next curve was like a horseshoe with the two ends higher than the center. Bad Hombre was the rear of the convoy at the top of the curve. There may have been a gun truck behind the convoy. Marty could not see the VC but sure could feel them. When the enemy opened fire from up the small hills to the left, it seemed like the convoy was hit from every direction. More enemy fire came from the left away from QL19 at the right very close about 7 to 10 meters at the left deeper down about other 10 meters and then up about 100 meters. Lemos was driving, Parks, the NCOIC, got his .50 and Marty jumped onto the left side of the truck to get the .50 on the back and see up on that curve but they kept moving. The enemy hit a couple trucks but not much damage, so Bad Hombre open fire in both directions because we were only three in the truck. As usual, the Hueys flew in and opened fire. So much hot brass fell on Bad Hombre and its crew filling the bed of the truck. Lemos was burnt when he had to change the barrel of the .50. It was too hot and the .50 was not working right. There was not much damage to the convoy except a couple holes in the trucks.

Return to Heavy Lift

In early September 1971, the Heavy Lift Platoon was running convoys with the 5-tons convoys since there were only about two or three 10-tons left, and then the new 10-ton tractors arrived. When the new ones arrived, Marty was reassigned back to driving in the Heavy Lift Platoon to teach the new drivers. First the new drivers rode shotgun with Marty, then they drove a bobtail and then since they were convoying with lightweights, Marty let the replacement drivers drive after the Mang Giang.

6th Ambush

Around September or early October, there was another ambush, he thinks on the way to Tuy Hoa. Marty did not participate, but knew the Cold Sweet was hit by a homemade mine like claymore and all the crew was either killed or wounded. One of the guys went on sick call and missed the run. At this time, the 512th TC was ready move to Phu Tai from the Cha Rang Valley.

The second time Marty drove to the border, he was a gunner on The Bad Hombre. Some officer was in front of Pleiku and formed a new convoy like before. They drove over a floating bridge and past a village with kids running out of the mission school. They passed a warning sign with a skull, “NO AMERICANS ALLOW BEYOND THIS POINT.” The crew just threw up their middle fingers at the sign. The camp was protected only on one side with bamboo. That night they received contact with the tracers going and the projectiles of the small tanks going and exploding on the hill in front of them.

One day Marty and his buddy, Lemos, were talking and both agree to extend in Vietnam for three months, so they be free when they got back to the world. They were supposed to fly home in November, but Santa Clause operation let them off 30 days early.

Going Home

Both rode in the same convoy, Lemos in the BAD HOMBRE and Marty driving a 10-ton. The BAD HOMBRE pulled up close to Marty's truck and said, "You are going home," to which Marty replied, "Yes, next month, I'm short." Lemos corrected, "NO MAN, WE ARE GOING HOME NOW!" Marty stopped his truck in the middle of the VC Valley and they asked on the radio for the names of the personnel going home. Marty heard, "Mike, Alfa, Romeo, Tango, India, November, Echo, Zulu," and then, Tango, Echo, Oscar, Delta, etc etc. Marty jumped back in the cab of his truck and was very happy. He told his shotgun, "When we get to the base this truck is yours." Marty Martinez and John Lemos processed out and flew home on the same plane.

Marty was very proud to serve his new country, the country of his real mother, the country where all his relatives on his mother's side had served. Uncle Johnny served in the Marines during WWII and Korea, his Uncle Erick was an Air Force pilot during WWII and Korea too, and the rest served in the Army. He had a grandfather, Joaquin, was also drafted in the Mexican army when he was only 13 years old and fought against the French with the Juaristas during the Mexican-French War. So Marty was a warrior like them, proud of everything that he did, with no remorse. He worked for McDonnell Douglas in Long Beach, California as liaison engineer and was laid off during the military downsizing in 1993, so he thought it was time to retire and move back to Mexico.